

## News



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# Chefs take a shine to 'fit' barra


**ROB BROADFIELD**  
FOOD EDITOR

Hidden amid rocky islands, out at sea near the mouth of King Sound, Australia's only barramundi without pot bellies are being "ranched".

Cone Bay Saltwater Barramundi is the sole saltwater barra producer in Australia and the nation's biggest supplier of the iconic fish, producing more than 1100 tonnes a year in the big tide country of the Kimberley.

The company is also one of half a dozen seafood producers in WA taking part in a unique co-operative arrangement between professional fishermen, Curtin University scientists and our top chefs.

"The relationship with chefs is fundamental to our business,"

Simon Little, of Cone Bay, said.

The research project — overseen by Curtin's Centre for Excellence in Science, Seafood and Health — is already paying dividends for diners as producers involved in the study are processing, packaging and delivering food products based on what chefs tell them they and their customers want.

"We're trying to understand what the market wants and values and use that to inform production, quality and packaging," the Centre for Excellence in Science, Seafood and Health's Janet Howleson said



**Leaner cuisine: Simon Little, of Cone Bay, shows one of his barramundi to chef Pete Manifis and Curtin University's Janet Howleson.**

at a producer and chef gathering in Perth last week.

Of Cone Bay's barramundi, Mr Little said: "Our barramundi have to swim like crazy against the big tides, which means they're fitter, their flesh is firmer and their fat is evenly distributed throughout their bodies."

"Pond-farmed and estuarine barra are lazy ... all their fat goes to their bellies."

Pete Manifis, head chef at South Perth's Incontro Restaurant, says

the product is grown to a size which suits the food service industry.

"We buy at 3kg to 4kg, a size which gives least wastage and is perfect for portion sizing," he said.

Dr Howleson says the project, which gets \$550,000 in funding from a range of government agencies, is unique in that it talks to chefs, not consumers. "We need more chefs to take part in the survey," she said.

"The more who take part, the more producers will know about the needs of chefs and restaurants."

## TASTE TEST

**CONE BAY OCEAN BARRAMUNDI MARINE PRODUCE AUSTRALIA**

Rich, dense flesh, lots of flavour and no muddiness. And it doesn't turn to mush when it's cooked. It's the best barra I've eaten. The skin is perfect for crisping in the pan.

**SADDLETAIL SNAPPER AUSTRALIAN BAY SEAFOODS**

This was the fish that chefs rejected because of its toughness. Now they're raving about the new 1.2kg size, which remains tender even when overdone. Pan-cooked with burnt butter and capers it was sweet, flaky and moist.

**BLUE SWIMMER CRAB ABACUS FISHERIES, SHARK BAY**

A sustainably caught product, Abacus crabs are bang on for flavour. We tried the product in a Thai-style fish cake. Superb new product from this family-owned fishing business.

Picture: Jonathan Bayley